

T.B. WILSON, MD., A FOUNDER AND BENEFACTOR OF THE AMERICAN ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY, AND HIS FAMILY: OUR FIRST NEWARK, DELAWARE-PHILADELPHIA CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT: Thomas B. Wilson (1807-1865) was one of 15 founders of The American Entomological Society (AES) in 1859. He contributed large sums of money, complete reference libraries, and comprehensive insect collections to the AES, and also helped guide this society in its early years. Several other Philadelphia organizations benefited from his generosity, especially The Academy of Natural Sciences. His contributions were so large and diverse that they greatly advanced the development of entomology and other natural sciences in the United States during their formative years in the 19th century.

Important contributions to science were also made by his brothers, Edward and William S. Wilson. Another brother, Rathmell, served on the Board of Trustees of Delaware College (now University of Delaware) in Newark for 41 years, and was acting president of the college for 11 years. Thomas' living quarters, private museum, and library were in a private wing of Rathmell's mansion, "Oaklands," southwest of Newark. Details on other Newark connections, and additional Wilson family members, are also included.

Throughout its 125 years of existence, The American Entomological Society (AES) has had members and subscribing libraries nationwide, as well as in many foreign countries. However, until recently, most members who attended regular meetings and those who managed the society (the governing "council") lived or worked within a 20-mile radius of the AES headquarters in Philadelphia.

From its founding in 1859, regular meetings of the society had always been held in Philadelphia. However, when the several U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratories in Moorestown, NJ, were closed (1971-73), most of the personnel were transferred to Newark, DE, joining staff and student entomologists at the University of Delaware. As a result, there were more AES members in the Newark area than in Philadelphia, so in recent years part of the society's business and regular meetings each year have been held in Newark.

The objectives of this paper are to: briefly review¹ the contributions of Thomas B. Wilson to the AES and other organizations; outline the little-known contributions of other members of his family to education and the

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¹Details have already been published in Ennis et al. (1865).

sciences; and document the first connection between Newark, DE, and the AES in Philadelphia, which occurred more than 110 years before the recent one described above.

T. B. WILSON

Thomas B. Wilson was born in 1807 in Philadelphia, of wealthy British parents (Ennis et al. 1865) who lived in America for 20-30 years (W-D)². He was well educated in sciences, pharmacy, and medicine in Philadelphia, PA, England, and Paris (W-D, W-A³, Ennis et al. 1865). Although he earned the M.D. at the University of Pennsylvania at age 23 (W-A, Sharf 1888), he never maintained a medical practice (Ennis et al. 1865). His pursuits in the natural sciences may have begun when Thomas was temporarily in poor health (as asserted by Sharf 1888), but they were probably maintained by the great interest Thomas had in the natural sciences, and his financial independence. He and his brothers and sister probably did not need regular employment: for example, when Thomas was 33, his father gave each son nearly 11,500 English pounds, and each inherited a larger sum when the father died three years later (W-D).

T. B. Wilson lived in Philadelphia (except when on his extensive travels) until he was 26, when he moved to a farm in rural Chester County, PA, in New London Township, and lived with his brother Rathmell (Ennis et al. 1865, W-D, 1840 Census). A few years later (perhaps when Rathmell married in 1836) T. B. purchased and moved to his own farm, nearby, in East Nottingham Twp. (1840 Census). In about 1841, Rathmell moved to near Newark, DE with this wife and two children, and Thomas joined them (W-D). A third brother, William S., also lived with them during much of the 1839-1843 period (W-D).

Newark remained Thomas' principal residence for the rest of his life (W-D). He regularly traveled on the train to Philadelphia, and maintained rooms there (Ennis et al. 1865), for use when he was in the city to attend AES and other society meetings, for his large book purchases, and perhaps for managing his investments.

T. B. Wilson made many distant trips on horseback to collect birds, minerals, shells, reptiles, fish, and fossils — in addition to insects (Ennis et al. 1865). He also purchased entire collections of these groups, and of pertinent reference books, by mail and during his five trips to Europe (Ennis et al. 1865, W-D).

²Wilson papers (University of Delaware special collections, Morris Library, Newark DE): to save space this source is referred to in the text as "W-D."

³Wilson papers, The Academy of Natural Sciences archives, Philadelphia, PA: referred to as "W-A" hereafter.

Available information (W-D, Ennis et al. 1865) suggests that Thomas invested his inheritance wisely, mainly in transportation stocks and bonds (railroads and a few canals). His generosity is well-documented. During his membership (1832-1865) in The Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia (the first institution of its kind in the United States), T.B.'s total gifts to this one scientific organization totaled \$200,000 (my estimate, based on data in Ennis et al. 1865). This sum was a very large fortune at that time, making Thomas a principal benefactor of this organization. Not all of this amount was in cash; T.B. gave 12,000 books to the academy, and was co-donor of 26,000 worldwide birds (Ennis et al. 1865). The latter gift was made necessary when Thomas was poisoned a second time, while curating his collection, by the arsenic then used to protect birds from insect and fungus attack (Ennis et al. 1865). This massive collection was far too large for the academy's original building at Broad and Sansom Sts., so T.B. financed construction of a large addition (Ennis et al. 1865). He also donated excellent collections of minerals, fossils, shells, reptiles, and fish to the academy (Ennis et al. 1865).

Thomas B. Wilson was one of 15 founders of The American Entomological Society in 1859 (Cresson 1909). During the next six years, he gave about \$26,000 to launch and sustain it (Ennis et al. 1865, Cresson 1909); some of these funds are still intact, as the "Wilson Fund," and help support the *Transactions of The AES*. He also donated to the AES at least 20,000 insects, and many now priceless books. For example, after his death, his 71 books on the Diptera were given to the AES. This was considered a complete collection of all known works on this order (Ennis et al. 1865). An oil painting of Thomas, apparently based on an engraving (in Cresson 1909) circa 1863, portrays his appearance during this period (Fig. 1).

Other known beneficiaries of his generosity were the Historical Society of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Medical Society (Ennis et al. 1865), and Fairmount Park (W-D).

Despite his large and frequent gifts, T.B. Wilson was genuinely modest. His donations were always made on the condition that if his anonymity were not maintained, he would not contribute further in the future (Ennis et al. 1865).

Ennis et al. (1865) also credited Wilson with exceptional wisdom in guiding the AES in its early years. They state that he recognized that the academy could never be a strong advocate for the field of entomology alone, and that a separate organization was needed to advance this field. They also indicate that T.B. concluded that an independent journal was needed to ensure the publication of entomological studies, and that he was instrumental in establishing such a periodical in 1862. This publication continued for 6 years, then was superseded by the *Transactions of The AES*, now in its 118th year.

THE WILSON FAMILY

Thomas' father was Edward⁴, a Quaker iron merchant (Ennis et al. 1865) who established the fortune that eventually enabled several of his children to contribute generously to science and education (W-D). He operated his successful business in Philadelphia from approximately 1795-1830 (my estimate). According to Lewis (1961), Edward owned a large townhouse on Chestnut St., which stood until ca. 1900. He returned to his estate, "Elm Farm"⁵, in Lancashire (county) near Liverpool in about 1830 (W-D). His portrait (Fig. 2), in the University of Delaware Library, is evidently one of four copied from the original after his death, for distribution to his four sons⁶ who lived elsewhere (W-D, W-A). The scene visible through the window on the left shows a train crossing a high bridge, probably a reference to Edward's investments in railroads (many family members purchased rail stocks (W-D)).

Edward and his wife Rebecca⁷ (Bellerby) had five (known) sons, three of whom lived most or all of their lives in America (Thomas, Rathmell, and William S.). Details on the Wilson family were compiled to allow identification of various family members and determine their relationships for this paper, from fragmentary data in W-D and other sources, and these will be recorded in Day (198-, in prep).

William S. Wilson⁸ lived in the U.S. until he was about 40, and is known to have made extensive collections of minerals (W-D)⁹. He moved to Paris in about 1843, and often assisted Thomas in obtaining and shipping specimens and books back to America. The limited information that I've seen suggests that he earned his living by careful investments (W-D).

In about 1853, William returned to America with his family and may have constructed a large mansion for himself, four row homes on property he already owned (all probably in Philadelphia), and a large commercial building¹⁰.

The remaining two sons, Edward (Jr.)¹¹ and Charles¹¹, were probably younger, because they returned to England with their parents (W-D). I have

⁴ca. 1772-1843 (W-D).

⁵Erroneously referred to in Ennis et al. (1865) as "Elmwood."

⁶When donated by Wilson descendents in ca. 1956, they believed that this portrait was of T.B. Wilson (W-A).

⁷Ca. 1776-after 1855. Listed as "Elizabeth" in Ennis et al. (1865), but her letters to Thomas (W-D) are signed "R. Wilson," indicating that Elizabeth is either a middle name or an error (she had a daughter named Elizabeth).

⁸Ca. 1803/05-1870 (LHCR, see references for full citation).

⁹Complete examination of the W-D papers may bring other contributions to light.

¹⁰Architect's plans (by Charles A. Rubicam) for these buildings are in W-D.

¹¹1812?-after 1866 (W-D).



Fig. 1. Thomas B. Wilson, M.D. (Courtesy The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia). Painted by Henry Ulke in 1881. Ulke was a well-known artist, photographer, and coleopterist (Banks et al. 1910), and was one of the first two members to join the AES after it was organized in 1859 (Cresson 1909).



Fig. 2. Edward Wilson, father of Thomas B. and Rathmell Wilson (Courtesy University of Delaware).

found nothing to indicate that they ever returned to America. However, both accompanied Thomas on some of his European trips, and assisted him in shipping his acquisitions to the U.S. (W-D). In addition, Edward is listed (Ennis et al. 1865) as a donor of 3,660 books and co-donor with Thomas of the immense Wilson bird collection (mentioned earlier) to The Academy of Natural Sciences.

There were also two (known) daughters of Edward Sr. and Rebecca. Helen Eliza died young¹² in Philadelphia, and Elizabeth¹¹ returned with her parents and two brothers to live in England (W-D). She later married Henry Crosfield (W-D).

Thomas' brother Rathmell¹³ actually initiated the first Newark, DE-Philadelphia, PA connection, by moving to Newark in 1841 (W-D). As mentioned earlier, T.B. and William followed. Rathmell was listed as a "farmer" in the 1850 census, but was also a civic leader and businessman, with investments in an insurance company (Sharf 1888), a coal mine in Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, and its associated short-line railroad (W-D). He evidently was a careful steward of his inheritance, for at age 50, he listed his net worth (1860 census) as \$250,000, and his occupation as "retired farmer."

Rathmell became a member of the Delaware College¹⁴ Board of Trustees in 1848, and served for 41 years (Viale 1968). He was president of this board twice, for a total of 11 years (1851-59, 1870-71). In addition, Rathmell was acting president of the college from 1859-1870 (Viale 1968), while it was closed due to low enrollment. The latter was the result of an unfortunate murder of a student, followed by the disruption caused by the Civil War (Handy and Vallandigham 1882). Rathmell's portrait (Fig. 3) is in the University of Delaware archives.

Rathmell was listed as a member of the AES in 1867, and contributed \$6,000 to the Society in that year. He also saw that Thomas' books and insects were given to the AES, after his brother's death (Cresson 1909).

The extended Wilson family first lived in a new house, constructed by Rathmell on his farm just southwest of Newark in 1841 (W-D). This home was referred to as "The Hermitage" (W-D). A large brick mansion was then built close by in 1845-1846 (Lewis 1961). Thomas financed the north wing (right side, in Fig. 4) for his private bachelor quarters (Lewis 1961). This was connected inside to the main house by only one door (Lewis 1961), and contained living rooms, a study, library, and museum. This house was named "Oaklands," for a large grove of oaks on the farm. The

¹²1803?-1808 (memorial inscription on Rathmell's stone in Laurel Hill Cemetery).

¹³1810-1890 (LHCR, W-D, 1850 and 1860 censuses). His name is incorrectly spelled (as "Rathmel") in several publications.

¹⁴Now University of Delaware.



Fig. 3. Rathmell Wilson (Courtesy University of Delaware).



Fig. 4. "Oaklands," home of Rathmell and Thomas B. Wilson (Courtesy University Archives). Exact location is shown in Fig. 5.

exterior was covered with stucco, and a mansard roof was added, in about 1890 (my estimate, based on Fig. 4). The house was well-known locally for its solid walnut interior trim (Cooch 1936) and many antiques (Hossinger 192?).

"Oaklands" was the home of the Wilson family for three generations, over a span of 110 years, and was a principal social center of Newark for at least 55 years (Gallagher 1983¹⁵, Hossinger, 192?).

The town of Newark in Rathmell and Thomas' time is shown in Fig. 5. The arrows indicate the single large Delaware College building (Fig. 6), and the "Oaklands" estate. The major streets are in the same locations as today. There were about 1,300 residents then (1860 census), compared to about 25,000 now (the city limits have been expanded over the years). The Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore railroad ("P, W & B") just south of town was used by Thomas and Rathmell on their many trips to Philadelphia, and was probably the reason for their relocation from the New London area which, despite its auspicious name, was destined to remain rural and thus lack the convenient schedules and speed that the "main line" at Newark offered.

The "Oaklands" estate was purchased in 1955 by Hugh F. Gallagher, Jr., a Newark developer, after the last of the three granddaughters (none ever married) of Rathmell died¹⁵. The mansion¹⁶, in need of many repairs, was torn down ca. 1962¹⁵, when new homes were being built nearby, but many of the oaks were intentionally left untouched. Mr. Gallagher, a graduate of the university, named the development "Oaklands" and one of the streets "Wilson Road." The mansion's access lane was relocated to the north in 1886, due to construction of the B & O railroad south of "Oaklands." This lane was eventually transferred to the city, and is now known as "Old Oak Road."

As far as I can determine, the last direct descendants of Rathmell Wilson in Newark were the three daughters (Martha R.¹⁷, Elizabeth E.¹⁸, and Alice¹⁹) of his son, Edward R. Wilson²⁰. Edward's family lived in "Oaklands" from about 1870, when Rathmell began to spend more of his time in his other residence, at 1712 Walnut St. in Philadelphia (W-D, LHCR).

Two other significant reminders of the Wilson family remain in Newark. The former St. Thomas Episcopal Church at Delaware Ave. and

¹⁵Personal communication.

¹⁶Former site just NE of intersection of Old Oak Rd. and Hullihen Dr.

¹⁷1864-1947 (W-D; personal communication from Mrs. Marilyn Mathias).

¹⁸1865-1955 (W-D; personal communication from Mrs. Marilyn Mathias).

¹⁹1868-1948 (W-D; personal communication from Mrs. Marilyn Mathias).

²⁰1839/41-1894 (no two birthdate sources agree: WCCCR; U.S. Census of 1850, 1860).

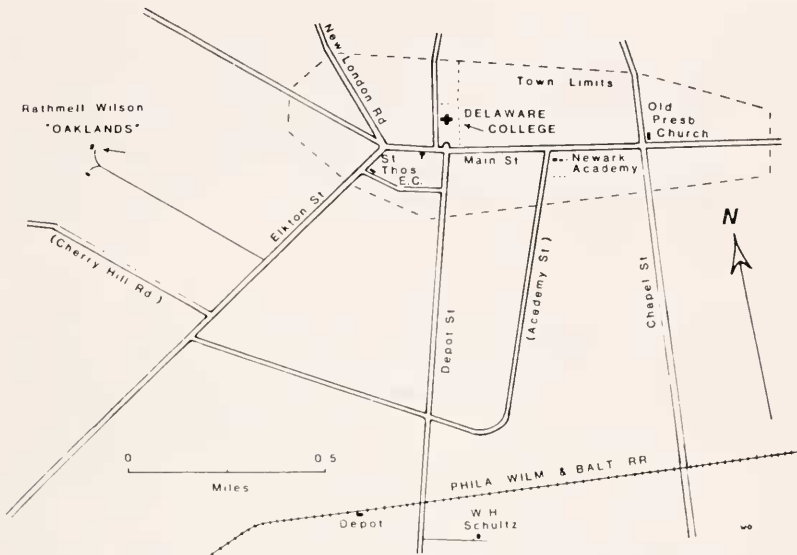


Fig. 5. Newark, DE and vicinity, ca. 1867 (adapted from Beers, 1868).



Fig. 6. Delaware College, as it appeared in Rathmell Wilson's time (courtesy University Archives).

Elkton "St.," (see Fig. 5) was constructed in 1844-45; 40% of the costs were subscribed by Thomas, Rathmell, and William Wilson (Handy and Vallandigham 1882). This church served from 1846 to the 1950's, when a new, larger building was erected a half mile away (Lewis 1961). Edward R. Wilson²¹ owned what is now the "university farmhouse" (previously the W.H. Schultz house, see Fig. 5) and considerable farm land for 22 years; unfortunately, he lost much of the family fortune purchasing unsuccessful race horses (Lewis 1961), and the farm was sold by the sheriff in 1889²². Edward died only five years later.

CONCLUSION

Thomas B. Wilson died after a short illness at age 58 (1865) in Newark, DE. As his condition worsened, it was finally recognized as typhus (Ennis et al. 1865), a disease that is frequently epidemic during wars (at the time, the Civil War had been raging for four years). Unfortunately, it was not until 1909 (James and Harwood 1969) that the transmitting agent of this rickettsial disease was identified as an insect, and more years passed before some preventive measures could be devised. It seems harshly ironic that his man, who had given so much of his time and funds to advance man's knowledge in entomology, was indirectly killed by a small insect. However, as entomologists well know, this unfortunate occurrence is just a small indication of the immense importance of insects to mankind, then and now.

Thomas' motto, "Res non Verba" (actions, not words), is engraved on his granite gravestone, located on the side of a high hill²³ overlooking the Schuylkill River, in Philadelphia. It is fair to conclude that he lived by his motto, and in so doing, he, with the assistance of others in his family, greatly advanced both the natural sciences and entomology, during their critical formative years in the United States.

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²¹Edward R. was also elected a trustee of the college in 1869 (Sharf 1888; Viale 1968).

²²Title search by John Clayton (personal communication).

²³South Laurel Hill Cemetary.

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²⁴Available on microfilm in National Archives Branches and many libraries; should be used in conjunction with recent indices by Jackson and Teeple (Accelerated Indexing Systems, Bountiful, UT; 1972-78). Helpful information is also in Trumbore, 1979.

²⁵This reference is best used after consulting the detailed index to it compiled by Coughlin and Fields in 1976.

²⁶Contains a large quantity of uncollated and unindexed material, mostly correspondence; a lesser quantity of Wilson material is filed separately in the "Evans collection," which has been indexed; the two collections are very similar in content, and are both included here under "W-D."